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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: STATE ELECTORAL COMMISSION RULES ON  
ELECTION RE-RUNS IN 196 POLLING STATIONS

REF: SKOPJE 368

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Following a review of political parties' complaints of irregularities and violence during the June 1 parliamentary elections (reftel), the State Electoral Commission has invalidated voting in 196 polling stations. The SEC decision opens a window for as many as 170,000 voters in northwestern Macedonia to cast ballots in re-runs of early Parliamentary elections scheduled for June 15. ODIHR's HoM positively characterized the SEC ruling as "revolutionary in light of past practices." The list of polling stations will be finalized later this week, after the Supreme Court reviews parties' appeals. In response to international community pressure and in an effort to improve the security environment in the Municipal Electoral Commissions (MECs) and Local Election Boards (LEBs) for the re-runs, the SEC also voted to fire six MEC presidents cited as having contributed to the irregularities. The impact of the SEC's decision to broadly re-run elections in disputed areas on Macedonia's ability to regain ground lost in the violence and fraud-marred June 1 elections will depend largely on the security climate during the June 15 re-runs. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On June 6, the State Electoral Commission (SEC) completed its review of political parties' and observers' complaints of irregularities, intimidation, and violence in the June 1 elections. The SEC annulled the voting of 196 polling stations in three Electoral Districts in northwestern Macedonia. Approximately 170,000 voters are registered in the polling stations in which the results were invalidated.

¶3. (SBU) By law, re-runs must be held on June 15, but a final list of polling stations to be included in the re-runs is not expected until late on June 13, following a 48-hour period for parties' appeals to the Supreme Court, an additional 48 hours for the Supreme Court to decide on each of the appeals, and a final decision by the SEC to re-run the elections in the polling stations in which voting was invalidated. (Note: Unless the Supreme Court unexpectedly overrules the SEC's decisions in a large number of polling stations, we expect re-runs in all polling stations in which voting was invalidated. End note.) Concerned that his party's mandate would be clouded by election problems, Prime Minister Gruevski offered strong public support for a broad re-run of disputed polling stations during the SEC's deliberations: "I expect the SEC to carefully review the complaints and if it has the slightest suspicion of

irregularities, to make a decision to re-run."

¶4. (SBU) All polling stations for which voting was invalidated are in majority ethnic-Albanian areas. The bulk of the polling stations are in the Tetovo and Gostivar region, with a sizeable number in Aracinovo and Lipkovo, as well as Saraj and Cair. Rival ethnic-Albanian parties DPA and DUI had divergent views on the impartiality of the review of complaints about polling stations. DPA announced it would appeal the SECs' decision, disappointed that very few polling station results in DUI strongholds were invalidated, while the bulk of the appealed polling stations in DPA strongholds were annulled. Press reported that DPA would boycott the re-runs if the Supreme Court upheld the SEC's decision, though DPA VP Selmani indicated to us that no such decision had been made. DUI, in contrast, praised the SEC's decision as "logical, fair, and based on fact."

¶5. (SBU) During the June 1 elections, a number of MECs and LEBs were cited as allowing and/or contributing to election fraud during the June 1 elections. We have encouraged the GoM to bring in LEB and MEC members from outside the areas of the disputed polling stations, as they would be less susceptible to local influence and pressure. In its first session following the marathon sessions to review parties' complaints, the SEC voted to release from service six MEC presidents in Tetovo, Gostivar, Saraj, Lipkovo, Bogovinje and Brvenica because of their roles in election irregularities. The SEC plans to assign on June 10 LEB members to polling stations which will hold re-runs. According to a local election-monitoring NGO, however, many LEB members have asked to be excluded from the second round of voting, concerned

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about security issues and pressure from the parties.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Although the SEC's comprehensive review of disputed polling stations and decision to broadly re-run elections in areas where violence and fraud dominated were supported by the PM and praised by ODIHR and the international community, a successful second round of elections is not guaranteed. ODIHR's long-term observers, especially in the Gostivar area, are concerned that incidents of violence and intimidation could increase in the second round. They report that DUI supporters, many of whom were restrained by party leaders in the first round, are threatening to take up arms in the second round. MEC and LEB members continue to report intimidation attempts by DPA activists, and many do not want to serve for the second round. Domestic observers from MOST also are concerned about the security situation, but nonetheless plan to monitor about 70% of polling stations. Whether the SEC's decision to broadly re-run elections in disputed areas will help Macedonia regain ground lost in the violence- and fraud-marred June 1 elections will depend largely on the security situation at and around the polling stations for the June 15 re-runs. End Comment.  
Milovanovic